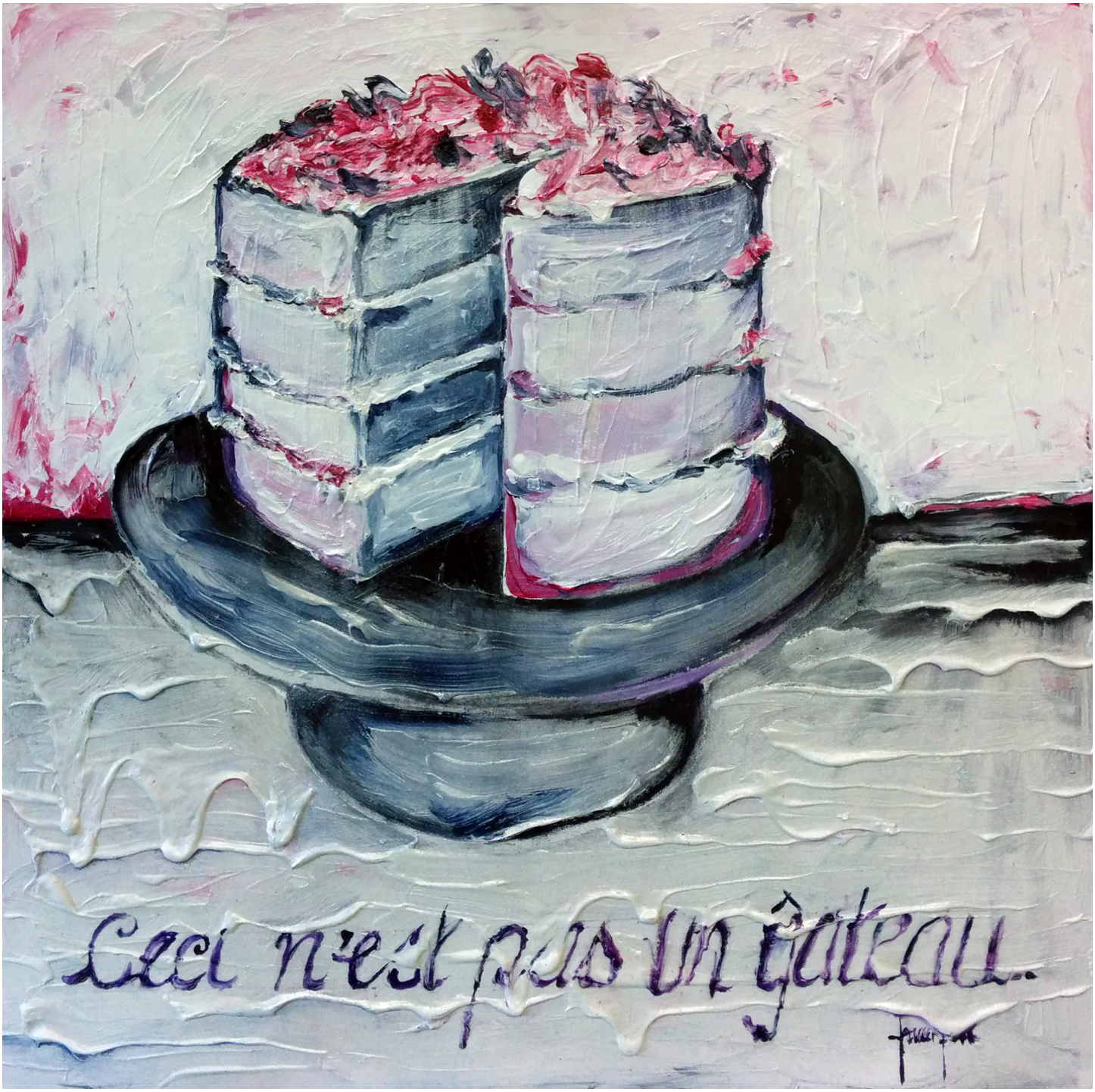


DREAMLAND

No. 3 • Five Dollars

Josephine Boxwell • Andrew Burton • Casse-Tête: Panel Discussion
Maureen Faulkner • Dee Horne • Graham Lazarovich • rob mclennan
David Miller • Carly Stewart • Chris Wagner

Publisher's Note

Dear friends,

the weekend of June 13-15, 2014 brought Prince George its first Piano Drop. It was part of the festival of which I find myself the producer: Casse-Tête: A Festival of Experimental Music. 2014 represented the festival's second year. Musicians working in a variety of challenging forms converged on Prince George to make radical art together. There was a conversation that set the tone for much of the weekend's research: a panel discussion on the Friday night after the Piano Drop. You'll find it transcribed here. I was the moderator. We get from instrumental technique to organized religion in less than two hours, which may be a record for this kind of thing.

I struggled to commit to a theme for this issue; some writers I told "vigil," after the great John Coltrane/Elvin Jones duet recording. Some I told it would be "experiments," thinking of Casse-Tête, and of the rich relationship between avant-garde sounds and words and images. Others were told the theme would be "send in the clowns." If these themes were a forest, somewhere in the deep woods there would be a mysterious cabin that would house the nameless actual theme of this issue, hidden even from me (perhaps from me most of all). These themes could be the three-way folding mirrors they used to have in Sears, which could turn a bored child into an effectively infinite number of slightly less bored children, using only the power to reflect light.

My brain fried in the heat. I can't talk and I can't breathe and my house still smells faintly like campfire.

In solidarity, in cake,

Jeremy Stewart

No. 3

ON THE COVER • *ceci n'est pas un ĝateau,* from the cake series by Maureen Faulkner;
BACK COVER • photo by Chris Wagner

The main text font in this document is Crimson, which is designed and provided free by Sebastian Kosch of aldusleaf.org. • Contact Publisher Jeremy Stewart via jeremy@greenmilkcreativeumbrella.com.
Send writing, send good faith. Consider advertising in Dreamland.

Robinson Crusoe • rob mclennan

1.

Thank God,

it's Friday, Crusoe crowed. A semiotic
first. Transparent lake, an island,

beach in hand, bestows

a local man a knighthood: his final
innocent dawn.

2.

Awake, catch fire, breathe. Skin
white on white. Porcelain,

translates. What part of purses
purse. The lips. Like Crusoe, lost

to his discovery. An island,
we astray, untethered; not

yet found. This ocean view: we stare
straight east, wide open

to Morocco.

Report: ostensibly, the weather • rob mclennan

1.

Then, and now. A troubled tongue,
lick down to

nothing.

Bare branch, trees. Scented thunder
storms

us out. Betrays

a proper name. We mis-
match clouds.

2.

Pretty wife, she says. It was
never thoughts

that counted.

3.

Rains, a cumulous. Diamond
of a chin, a meaning.

Many sides. We

beneath, undress.

Self-portrait, with landscape, ● rob mclennan

1.

A scientist claims that mushrooms

are concentrated stores of memory.

2.

You are not to conform
to a heart bent feral, absolute.

Somewhere, there is quiet, I
no longer miss.

I would jump high enough.
I would answer all these prayers.

3.

Her soup cools on bedside dresser,
delivered to battle throat infection,

the sunlight slant, and soothe.

Greyhound: passage ● rob mclennan

1.

Would have my head.

Eclipse in ways those other forms
cannot. A slow,

slow wind.

2.

Forgotten, package.

Group-speak, spirals.

Which requires tenderness,
a shared

small space.

3.

So apt, a vessel
repetition.

Wire less
lessness.

Casse-Tête: A Festival of Experimental Music
Panel Discussion: The Importance and Unimportance of Technique
Friday, June 13, 2014

Casse-Tête: A Festival of Experimental Music is an annual event that is held at The Exploration Place in Prince George, BC. 2014's festival, its second year, featured a panel discussion on the theme of "the importance and unimportance of technique: technique/s and my artistic practice." The participants shared with the audience about the relation of their artistic practice to "technique" or "techniques." As Jeremy Stewart's notes for the event program said, "conventional or othodox traditions of western music-making have often defined themselves in terms of, or otherwise depended on, prescriptive ideas about instrumental technique that were (and are) inextricable from the horizons of what is to be considered musical. It is pertinent to examine the relationships between the technical approaches we as musicians and composers take and the 'other' musicalities we thereby simultaneously embrace. "

The participants were Catherine Sikora, Stanley Jason Zappa, Nick Skrowaczewski, Dave Chokroun, Jonathon Wilcke, and Jose Delgado-Guevara; the moderator was Jeremy Stewart. Transcription by Beki Tubbs.

Jeremy Stewart: Okay, hi everybody. My name is Jeremy Stewart. I am the festival producer of Casse-Tête: A Festival of Experimental Music, and I would like to welcome you all to our evening program tonight. Of course, I think many of you have witnessed and experienced the piano drop, and this is the remaining portion of this evening's program: a panel discussion, the topic of which is the importance and unimportance of technique. I have this amazing group of artists here to speak about technique or techniques and the role of technique in their artistic practices. The format for this panel will just be that we'll hear a bit from each artist, starting with Dave Chokroun and ending with Jose Delgado-Guevara. Everyone will talk a bit about their practice and about technique, and then we'll all have the opportunity to ask our questions and engage in a bit of discussion about that with some give and take, so let's go ahead with that. So, Dave Chokroun.

Dave Chokroun: Hello. I'm Dave. I'm from Vancouver, and I am here representing The Institute for the Study of Advanced Musical Research, which is a tongue-in-cheek kind of umbrella organization that is really just me and my closest collaborators. In the spirit of not being too serious, I gave the organization the most ridiculous name possible.

So, what do I do? Well, by training, I am a classical pianist, a bit of a classical bass player, and a composer. I spent probably too long in music schools. In my practice, I am a jazz bass player, an improviser, a noise musician, a punk rock bass player, and a composer. I try to work in ways that really confound a lot of the things that I was taught.

I'll speak to the question of technique with my composer hat on. Teaching technique to students is really easy because technique is something quantifiable. Teaching meaning, or how

to arrange the stuff into a way that helps people reach their idea of meaning and their idea of authorial intention, is very hard. Teaching creativity—let's not even go there, right—because creativity is something that is unquantifiable. One person who talks about that is the guitar player Derek Bailey, and he talks about jazz education in his book Improvisation. He says the way we teach jazz has coalesced around bebop because bebop is very structured, has been very well recorded from its origins until the present day, and there are things, structurally, in bebop that you can pull out, that you can teach easily. Whereas, teaching early jazz, or free jazz, is extremely hard by comparison, and I don't know that there is really a successfully recognized method for teaching either of those. I think in the academic music and classical world, the classic composition student's pitfall is to prepare a laundry list of instrumental techniques and then work with those because they are shortcuts to an aesthetic that is already in practice.

I think about workshops that I went to when I was a composition student, the kind of thing where they'll take four students and put them with an ensemble for a month. So, you're working with an ensemble that has a body of work that they perform from, and the weird thing is that you're kind of just actually reproducing more of that ensemble's body of work. You sit down with instrument players who are like "Well, you know, these are some of my clarinet multiphonics," and you're taking notes, and surprisingly at the end of the workshop, everybody writes a piece with that material. All this has value for teaching and learning, so I'm going to put it out there: I would like to think the sign of finding your own voice and finding maturity—I will let you know when I get there, right—is to unhook from received ideas about those practices.

In my own work, I went through a period where I used a lot of instrumental extended technique, but I eventually pulled back from that. I wanted to see what happened if I simplified, if I didn't use 'instrument tricks.' I'm not opposed to extended technique, but I think you should be deliberate about what you're doing and not just grab on to the ethos of another player or another creator. The way that I work that compositionally—I used to work on scores that were very, very detailed and had a lot of instructions in them. Now, if I actually use notes on paper, my notations are really dead standard most of the time, but what I find interesting to get out of performers is, "This is how you play with other people in this piece, in this ensemble," not "This is how you play the instrument." It becomes relational and the pieces turn into kind of social psychology experiments that tell you how a group works together. For me, that's a political point. You're modeling people working together in a collective every time you put an ensemble together. So, that's all I'll say, and that's how I've come to make my peace with training and technique.

Jeremy: Thank you Dave. So, next, Stanley Zappa.

Stanley Jason Zappa: Hi, I'm Stanley. I'm very happy to be at the second annual Casse-Tête. I was here at the first one, and quite enjoyed it.

When I heard about the topic and subject of this talk, I remembered a story from when I was in college. I was in my professor's studio, and it was the beginning of the year, and everyone was signing up for courses. I was sitting around waiting for my turn, and a piano player came in and said he wanted to sign up for Bill's ensemble class, which was where professor Bill Dixon would really undo his top button and expound on his theories and really let the music do a lot of talking. He was figuring out this guy's schedule, and he saw that [the student] had all these private lessons and cham-

ber classes with, for want of a better word, the "white music division," doing something in the classical realm. Bill was like "Well, why are you taking these courses? What do you want to get out of these courses? You tell me that you want to play this music but you're taking all these other classes," and this fellow said, "Well, I want to take classical piano so I can get a good technique."

I remember Bill yelling for a good five or ten minutes after, because the idea was: did Bud Powell have an inferior technique because he didn't play Rachmaninoff? Did McCoy Tyner have an inadequate technique on the piano because he didn't play Schumann? And so, that stuck with me. I don't know really what the punch line was because I don't think they are two totally distinct and separate camps. Technique, as I think I understand it, is that which you have to get your message across. So, if your message is rooted in one tradition, it doesn't make any sense that you would go to the parent culture's tradition in order to glean what is commonly accepted as technique, when in fact there is always a technique no matter what music you're doing, and techniques aren't hierarchically arranged.

So, that's my takeaway about technique, and in my own playing, technique is really pretty rudimentary. You know, it's put on the shoes, brush the teeth, do some stretches, and just go out and do the day. There's no instrumental Zumba classes, there's no elliptical backwards-pedaling classes, or anything like that. I think I have a fairly simple message, being a simpleton myself, and so the technique just kind of evolves out of what I want to have heard out of the form. So, technique does for me carry a bit of a negative connotation, and I think there is always the need to check one's classism and ideas of hierarchy when discussing this thing called technique. There's always a technique.

Nick Skrowaczewski: Hi, I'm Nick Skrowaczewski, and this is my first time up here, and it's really cool, we just arrived today. Stanley and I have been friends and musical collaborators, I think we're talking about 22-23 years now, which is great. It's been a big satisfying part of my existence and my main musical collaboration over the years. I also studied Bill Dixon with him at Bennington.

I'm a percussionist, I play drum set and a little bit of piano, but the drum set is my main instrument. In my young years, I was exposed to a lot of classical music with its precision and all that, and as I grew older and checked out more kinds of music, I sought out something that was emotionally resonant and that could include things that had, if you will, imprecision in technique. The word "sloppiness" doesn't really work for me because it doesn't have an accurate connotation. I noticed that there was a difference in how I felt from hearing players that had a very physical and sort of rich physical technique that was sometimes imprecise, but then one of those players would make me feel something and the other wouldn't. I thought that was kind of fascinating, and it started to make me think about why that is and what's behind that. So, that is still a question and a search to this day, and will be 'til the day I die, of course. I think my guess is that it has something to do with the joy of the physical moment of making sound occur in playing, and at that instant if there's a real spirit and intent behind something, the result, whether precise or imprecise, will be something that will be emotionally communicative, and as far as the notion of technique, that's what I like and what I search for. So, okay, that sounds good.

Jeremy: Catherine Sikora.

Catherine Sikora: Hello, I'm Catherine. This is definitely my first time here and my first time in Canada. I'm living in Lodi, New Jersey, and

I'm originally from West Cork, Ireland, and I play saxophone. When I got this question about the importance of technique, my first initial reaction was "I mean you have to have technique." I love it, I absolutely love it, and I'm not ashamed to say it, perhaps because of how I came up, and if I can quickly just let you know how I started in music.

West Cork in Ireland is really low in population, I think my school had 50 people in it. There was no music, there were no instruments, there was no nothing, and for some reason I got obsessed with saxophones and decided I was going to become a saxophone player. I really don't know why. So, I had to teach myself, and so I taught myself, and I read theory books at home, and then I somehow got into a college in England to do a degree in jazz. So, I have nothing but my degree. I don't have those formative years of a teacher saying, "Okay, now we're going to learn this scale, and then next week we'll learn that scale." I didn't do that.

So, on the question of technique, technique is something I grew to love simply because the operation of the machine that I use to express myself is something I really love, and the better I get at it the more fun it becomes. I think it's important in the way that learning to walk and to speak is important for children. Walking, of course, is really important, you have to learn how to walk. At the same time, once you get the hang of it, and once you become really good at it, then you need to not pay attention to how good you are at it at all. So, you gain whatever technique you gain, but it almost is meaningless; then it just needs to be there, and then your problem is how to express yourself. And then, as I thought further about the question, I thought "Well, I don't think everybody needs to have and to pursue endless technique as an end in itself," which it never is. And what I arrived at was, what I think everyone has really touched on, which is that the important thing is having the vocabulary with which you can express yourself, and also, in terms of extended techniques, having that vocabulary become part of your language so that it's not artificial. You're not using a big word just because you just learned it yesterday and everyone is going to think you're clever if you're using it; you're actually genuinely using it as an authentic part of your expression. I hope I made some sense, I don't know if I did.

Jeremy: Absolutely. Jonathon Wilcke.

Jonathon Wilcke: Hi, I'm Jonathon Wilcke. I live in Calgary right now. I'm a saxophonist and an English professor well in between jobs, and I write about improvisation and how improvisation and technique work in poetry that attempts to use improvisation. My relationship to technique resonates with Catherine Sikora's small town story. I lived in a small town too. There were saxophones there, although I think they were often mistaken for a U-joint, a plumbing U-joint. We did have a band in school but hardly any cultural information could get into the town. I was very isolated, so the first thing that influenced my technique is that I have no culture. I've had to make things up on my own, so I'm driven to learn techniques I find are useful. The other thing that influences my technique is that I had a horrible hand problem for about seven years, and I think it was largely brought on by practicing palm keys; I blew my left hand practicing different kinds of altissimo fingerings. I realized that there were probably some technical things that I was not going to be able to do. Then, also, I am attracted to the saxophone and the myriad of wonderful sounds it can make if you isolate those sounds and develop the technique.

I want to think my technique is value-neutral. As a lot of people have expressed this evening, we want to think of technique as a value-neu-

tral thing, not, say technique in the classicist meaning, i.e. the proper techniques. So, I think of it as value-neutral, but also necessary, in fact, especially as a saxophonist. If you compare a saxophone to a guitar, for example, you pick up the guitar, and I don't play, but I can make a pleasant sound just by plucking open strings and the sound is there. If you play the saxophone, it takes a couple of days or more to make those initial sounds. I'm saying that technique is necessary to get the machine to do what it's supposed to do. Thank you very much.

Jeremy: Thank you Jonathon. Jose Delgado-Guevara.

Jose Delgado-Guevara: My name is Jose, and I am a typical classic trained violinist, violist, composer. Everything super regimented since I was five. No hope to do anything else but just follow the program. When I went to college, it was very interesting because there was a constant war. Because I wanted to do composition, there was a war between the different composition teachers. For example, there is a teacher that does this style or the other style, the guy that studied at Juilliard, the guy that studied in Germany, the guy that hasn't gone anywhere: they are all at war and you have to choose your camp and then fight during the recitals, which is not true but it's what happened. When I was going through that, I was just like, "This is just a bunch of b.s." It was very interesting. Some of the students had this incredible background of traditional harmony up to the present moment; they would recite books about harmony, and their compositions did not resonate with me. There was nothing there. I mean, they can tell you "These are the chords that I used, these are the inversions, this is the rhythm, the macros, the micros, the poetry that I used, and this is why," but there is no emotional resonance. And it's like, what is it? It didn't live as a thing, and so you cannot touch it, you cannot feel it.

On the other hand, the people that were just in improvisation class that would play something and you're like, "Wow, this is it." There's something in that communication that you can actually touch and identify. Sometimes it was just two notes, three notes, you know. Sometimes it was just the guy just doing this [snaps fingers], or just humming. The thing about technique and composition technique is not what you know but how you communicate, and have the incredible desire to communicate, the obsessive desire to communicate. When we don't want to communicate, then it's—from my perspective—it's dry, it doesn't reach you, might as well just stayed home and then do whatever I want. But if I want to reach another human I have to have that incredible desire to communicate something. If it's ineffective, then I will just improve upon on what I want to communicate. Concerning technique, as an instrumentalist and as a teacher, I consider it an important tool but never the end. You don't need to know [technique] perfectly to be a very communicative artist. I do consider that I've seen musicians that are incredible at technique, the mechanics of the instrument, but—and this is the typical thing, it's almost a cliché—cannot communicate.

And then on the other hand, others that are the opposite, [they can communicate but do not have a developed technique]. I want to strike l a balance between technical skill and communication. I call it patriarchy of perfection. When we want to show how good and perfect I am, and then everything else, like communication, just goes down. So, for me what is important: if you are very good at technique, the mechanics of technique, is communication. And even if you're not that good, if your desire is to communicate, then the goal of music happens, and that's the important part. Communication comes first.

Why do we want to do music? I don't think

we want to do music because we want to play the most beautiful G in the world, to have the most round saxophone sound, right, or play the fastest drum kit in the West. I think after a certain level, we want to communicate something, even if we don't know why or what. It's an obsessive desire that we have to listen and to feel what the musician plays. As a composer, I try to do things as extremely simple as possible because they are extremely hard to play as a violinist. If you write a lot of notes, playing them on the violin is easy. If you just write two notes that last 12 beats, it's the most incredibly butt-clenching moment in your life. At the same time, you can hear the comments from the audience telling you "That piece was so relaxing," but all the musicians are sweating. But that's the interesting thing about technique though, right, that technique does not communicate, and that's the point that I wanted to make. I have the technique to hold a note for 24 beats, and I might be sweating bullets but you don't see that, you don't have to know the technical aspects of what the musician is doing. What you are doing, what you are enjoying is actually the communication. And just to wrap it up, for me if we need to develop a technique, a real technique, as an artist, composer, instrumentalist, we need to develop the nuances of communication, to understand communication amongst ourselves. I think communication is more important and has more validity than just looking at technique as separate from communication. Thank you.

Jeremy: Thank you to all the artists for sharing their points of view. If people have questions, let's have them.

Audience Member #1: You all touched on a similar point about the artist who has the impeccable technique but who leaves you feeling flat, or doesn't move you, or doesn't communicate well, and I'm curious about that. I'm just putting this open to everybody: What is it? Why is that? What is it in that artist that prevents them?

Jose: I think what I don't see is their desire to communicate whatever discourse the music has.

Audience Member #1: So, do they lack desire? They don't actually have desire?

Jose: I just want to see their intention a little bit more clearly. And personally, when I refer to technique overtaking communication, it's not exactly the players, but lack of communication can be part of composition. I used to hang out a lot in college with jazz players, with the acid jazz crowd, and also people that would, have a chart 25 chords or more, and chords upon chords . But it doesn't matter how many chords you put; if the communication stays in the chords, then it doesn't move me. If what gets you off is a composer is the complexity of the manipulation of technique, I do not think your desire to communicate something beyond will actually happen. That's what I wanted to say.

Catherine: In my opinion, for many people, it's attachment to technique as an end rather than technique as a means. Technique should be the thing that functions for you to get your feelings out into the air in the form of sound waves. If all you're thinking is your brain obsessing about technique, technique, technique, you might not even be connected to how you feel, is like shining your attention on the technique as the thing that you're demonstrating. "Look at how fast this car goes," "look at how fast I can play this," that's one thing. The other thing is someone using the technique, with no thought for the technique, as purely as an expressive tool, if that makes sense.

Audience Member #2: I have a question for the sax players. The way you both discussed technique made me think of watching Co-

lin Stetson, and liking every single part of his saxophone and focusing on a very particular kind of breathing technique. Stetson is someone that has been taken up by the mainstream as someone who is interesting in terms of sax, and so I'm curious how the three sax players see Colin Stetson.

Stanley: I've seen more pictures of him than I've heard his music, and so that gives me a moment for pause. Getting back to Bill Dixon, because I have no real thoughts of my own, he used to say, "Whenever something gets popular and people start to say 'Hey! This is the meat of the week,' I run the other direction." Personally, if I see someone who's garnered a lot of attention and a lot of acclaim, I feel like they're probably pretty well tended to and they don't need my attention because what do I have to add, right? So, everyone else has got that pretty well taken care of. I don't really know too much about his music, but it always does interest me how certain talents, certain people playing certain musical games, ascend while others do not. And I don't know if that's a musical question, I don't know if that's a PR question, I don't know if that's a psychological or sociological question, but he certainly has touched on something to get him to where he is and for him to have that market share that he does. I don't know what it is, just because I haven't heard, but it is fascinating that it exists, that someone playing a saxophone can command that much attention while someone else playing a saxophone does not.

Catherine: I've heard Colin play a lot, it was great. First of all, he plays bass, so that in itself is just kind of a jaw dropping instrument for the player and everyone watching him. It is just such a physical beast just to do pretty much anything on it. It's giant, all the keys are giant, everything is heavier, the mouthpiece is huge. I think what he's doing is extending his technique, and with the micing thing and everything, and I know he mics his throat, he is very, very seriously into circular breathing. It appears to me that what he is doing is evolving his technique to include the electronic aspects. So, in other words, his instrument is no longer just the saxophone, but it's also, because it's all about the sound he's producing, it's also the microphones, and that's completely valid. Everyone is doing that now, they are using computers, they are using all kinds of different stuff because, let's face it, if you can make noise with it and we are intending it to be music, then it's some kind of art, some kind of music. So, that's my opinion of what he's doing, and I think it's interesting.

Jonathon: I think I can answer, with my view, something that Stanley was musing about. Colin Stetson comes from indie rock, not a jazz tradition, and in the indie rock tradition, they call improvisation noise. As a saxophonist, who doesn't have a lot of improvisation friends to hang out with, I hang out with the indie rock crowd, and everyone says to me, "Have you heard of Colin Stetson?," and I answer the question, "Yes, I'm really impressed by his technique, he has mastered a number of physical things that I myself would like to be able to do but don't think I can." And he's using extended techniques in the service of song form, using them to put together the song form, but is he doing something outside of the technique and, what Jose was talking about, is he doing something communicative? Well yeah, the song form he's using, that's a communicative form in the indie genre. But the saxophone playing itself . . . if I could hear what he was doing with it through improvisation, I could be clear what his relationship was to the technique. I do think his technique is good in itself, and he is doing something for saxophone players in that he's putting this kind of saxophone technique out into a world where the last thing most people have heard from the saxophone is someone playing "Baker Street."

Audience Member #3: So how do some of you experience music? My background is painting, and I used to work quite large but I love paintings of any size. To me art, or painting, say on a canvas, is all rhythmic and all about music. Paintings make me want to dance, big beautiful paintings especially, they got rhythm, I get in front of them, and boy I can hardly sit still or stand still. And music always was structural to me, it's a huge structure, it's all around you, it's three dimensional, and it's even more three dimensional than sculpture. Music is like this massive structure that is swirling all around you, and you're experiencing it, and, you know, it has this huge volume in the spatial sense that's there. So, I don't know. I'm sort of curious how other people experience it, and it doesn't matter what type of music it is, it's got this body and it's spatial. I'm curious though, how some of you just experience music as a basic thing.

Stanley: Well I'll say, the more I play music and the more I am exposed to the language of music, the smaller it seems to get, and the more eroded it becomes. I remember as a child turning on the radio and just having that feeling like "Oh my God, there's this gigantic pulsating thing in front of me," and as I grow older and, just am with music more, it's all shrinking and it's eroding. When I hear music with any symmetry, or any kind of proportion, or any kind of second guess at decorum or what's appropriate or what can be said, I feel betrayal, and I wonder why in the year 2014, why are we still adhering to song forms that predate civil rights? Why are we adhering to song forms and traditions that predate the Emancipation Proclamation? It doesn't seem to be its own living thing but a lot of music seems to be behaviour modification. That's what it seems to me, and so I can't, I don't, listen to as much music anymore. I'm a lot of fun at cocktail parties.

Dave: I want to unpack what you said. Is that a little bit like because you've played for so long, do you feel like the mystery of sound erodes.

Stanley: Yes.

Dave: I think about the first record I owned that was given to me, the soundtrack to Star Wars, and we had gone back to see Star Wars in the theatre at least four or five times. I think my mom really liked it because it reminded her of samurai movies, and also loved the music, and I must have listened to that LP at least twice a day for about three or four or five years. So, there was something magic about that being in a movie and then being in my house. And now I've also used the Star Wars soundtrack to teach tutorials for motivic development, and with the music school brain I identify, for example, "Well, this is the part that's a pastiche from Stravinsky." This does touch on the idea of the technical because one side of listening to Star Wars in the classroom is analysis and how we think about what we're hearing, which is a lived experience of a technique that builds up. This is not really answering your question at all, but I'm just running with it. It's kind of like: once you hear what Auto-Tune sounds like, you realize that Auto-Tune is in everything and you can't stop hearing it.

Nick: I really like what you said about the experience of music as this 3D experience, that's kind of a grand and affecting thing, and I think that's what I think about. In sort of a sociological way, I think I'm really concerned, and I have been for a long time, just about how that 3D experience could be that way for so many humans, and yet what ends up happening is that just being inundated with so much music from so many different sources is that it when you hear it your mind immediately starts to not get inside it but tells you what it signifies about how you should act in the space you're in or what kind of subculture you're in the midst of, those kind of sociological things. But it would be nicer to have people of all different ages

getting inside music as a pure 3D sort of environment, and not having these other signifiers come into play so much. So, I don't know, it just made me think of that.

Catherine: May I ask you, when you were thinking about your question, were you thinking about how we experience music when we're listening, or when we're participating, or did you not think about it in that way?

Audience Member #3: I was kind of leaving it open, and see what you said sort-of-thing.

Catherine: Because for me, I don't listen to that much music anymore. I tend to be playing a lot. I'm a musician, my husband's a musician, there's not much space in the air at home to listen, but when I do, I tend to go back to stuff that I love and that I know really well, and for me I have an ever increasing sense of wonder that is I can even pinpoint certain moments in certain records, a lot of, of course, Coltrane records because I'm a saxophone player, where I have suddenly had flashes of understanding about how it felt to make that note sound, and that to me is an ever increasing beauty. It's like I'm getting more into the snowflake in the microscope, and that's how that feels.

Audience Member #4: As a piano technician, I train my ear to listen to particular aspects of piano tone that other people don't. And so if I listen to something on the radio and the piano sounds out of tune it bugs me. Or if there's a serious piano technician in the room and somebody puts on Horowitz's Golden Jubilee concert where he played on the second piano concerto at Carnegie Hall, and the piano technicians have their hands on their ears because the piano is voiced so terribly. Most people [non-piano technicians] don't know or they wouldn't know; it doesn't bother them, but it hurts our ears. Do you ever find that your own process of mastering the technique of your own instrument or compositional technique decreases your enjoyment of listening to other people's music because you're noticing flaws in their technique?

Jose: When people ask me what music I listen to, I say I hate listening to music, and I do hate it. The act of putting a CD, or finding music on an iPod, I hate that. I hate the action of listening actively to a recording, I usually don't do that. And what I hate the most is listening passively, when you go to a restaurant and the music is invading your space, and I developed an amazing technique for blocking out music so that it doesn't exist to me. So, I'm hanging out with musicians and they're like "can you listen to this crap?" and I'm like "What?" It's not existing, right, it's so offensive that I developed a shield to make sure it doesn't bug me. You can get very calloused. Sometimes you have hatred to recordings, and sometimes you can keep listening to details and stuff, but it has to have an emotional thing. I haven't found a recording that I like.

For me, it's more I enjoy what I make, physically, but to enjoy other people's playing: I usually avoid it as much as I can simply because I don't enjoy it. I don't enjoy the passive act of listening to music at all. Simply because you become so analytical and then there's no enjoyment of any physical response, the aspect of communication: you're boycotting it before it gets to you. I have this response because I've been doing music since I was five. You know what I'm saying, it's just you are so embarrassed of 15 hours, 12 hours a day of constant playing music, so going home and putting on a CD doesn't happen. I find myself that I'm not the kind of musician that can tell you "Oh, this player is this guy, and this player is this other guy." I don't have time to memorize all this, unless there's a really emotional connection. Like, were you in that city? Were you playing that? Then I would find it more significant. What

I enjoy, and this is the real relationship that I have with music, I enjoy the act of making music, even if I'm recreating others' music. But the act of sitting down of and listening to music, I don't enjoy.

Dave: I have a running joke that because I'm a classically trained musician: I'm really good at not hearing things I don't want to hear.

Jose: That's part of the training that we have.

Dave: Well, actually, there's something about being in these practice spaces where you have 30 rooms with a piano in them and everybody is working on something else. That's actually the kind of the listening skill that you have to develop if you're actually going to do any work. So it's a joke, but it's actually not a joke.

Jose: I mean just to be a little bit slightly political, I mean it's not even political, but sometimes I think as a violinist, and this is extremely cynical. I was made a drone as a violinist: I was created to be part of an orchestra, you see what I'm saying. The plan was set in front of me. I didn't question it. I enjoyed it, but I found myself like "Whoa, why am I doing this?" People have to actually put money in front of me for me to play Beethoven Five again. Otherwise, if it would be my real choice, if I were not dependent on that cheque, I would not do it. Honest, I would not do it because I've done it so many times, right, and even though Beethoven Five is an important part of Western culture and blah blah blah blah blah blah, but sorry, it's just too many times. And that's what I was, I was a drone, and you create the right technique to play all the Western canon of music, since you're five or even younger. I mean, that happens to pianists, to violinists. You're there, and you enjoy it, but then you get to a point in your life where you're like, "Okay, what is all this about?" And then why I'm questioning this is because orchestras around the world are shutting down, tons of musicians without work but they're drones so they need to be in a hive and the hives are dying, that's what's happening to orchestras all over the world.

Jeremy: Oh yeah, no, I'm so grateful that as your boss I'm hearing this now.

Jose: I'm talking about being trained classically. I was not deprived, I just didn't choose any other things that are greater in life, and then you find yourself in a spot and questioning absolutely everything. I mean the whole thing about I hate music is not that I took a stand saying "I'm going to hate music today." No, it's just when you went home and sat on it, you're like, "Oh shit, what is this, let's turn everything off." You just don't want it in your life. But at the same time I enjoy immensely improvising for hours and hours, and then we're work shopping a piece, like, I'm playing a piece that I collaborated with one of my students, which is interesting because he's got very bad technical habits, but then when we were talking about a specific technical thing about not pressing too hard, we created the piece that we're going to perform at the festival, can I say it was magical, but then he learned the technique simply because he was creating with it, right. So, I was questioning myself. Sometimes as a teacher you are so stuck in the same thing because it's been done since the 1200s, and you think suddenly this guy understands the technique in a second simply because he started creating something, understanding phrasing, and understanding not squeezing the living crap out of the fingerboard, very easily, simply by creating. So, I never decided to hate music, but since I'm a drone, I was forced to rest when I went home and not enjoy it that much. So, I don't enjoy "Hey dude, let's jam." I hate that. All those things I don't enjoy much because that's my job, and at the same time I do find myself enjoying little aspects like someone playing a C major scale, and you're like "Whoa, purity, there it is,

can this be valid as a song?" This is my song: seven notes to you, period. And for me that's more valid expressively than 11 million chords or listening to the radio, to a recording of this guy in 1984, and this other guy in 1972. I don't have that connection with music. For me, my connection is more of something that I create at the moment and how my physical actions happen, and I don't see that, I don't live that through a recording.

Catherine: I think it's not our job. I mean we produce the thing, so we are not the consumers of the thing. It's like a chef cooking 200 plates of dinner in a night. He doesn't want to eat that, he certainly can't eat all of it, and yet people somehow expect musicians to consume just as much music as they produce. And aside from just your ears needing a rest, I don't think it's healthy. You know, we need a certain amount of silence. I will, however, say one of my favourite things to hear is a piano being tuned. I love it, I love hearing good bending notes. It's beautiful. It's like the emergence of an order from that, and it's fantastic. Recently, I was in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York, which is, I think, the tallest gothic cathedral in the world, it's ridiculously tall, and they were tuning the organ, and I just went in to sit there. And I sat there, and ohhh, because the organ notes were bending and at the same time they were stacking up in this giant cavernous stone building, and it was just insane. I was like, "How often do you do that because I will come back!" I don't want to listen to a CD but that was exciting, so nice job.

Dave: I have a thought or question to turn back to. There's a certain thread I'm hearing in a lot of what people are saying, and actually starting with something Jose said first about being in school where the composition teachers didn't get along and they had their kind of factions. I think my experience with one of the schools I went to was very similar. These guys teaching didn't get along and the students would kind of take on this kind of "Yeah you're just writing neoclassical," or, I remember me and my friends' put-down was "It's pirate ships, that piece is like total pirate ships, Danny Elfman." So, that's something where there's an aesthetic thing, which is also technical, that also turns into a value judgment. "Well, you're not doing this my way, which is also the right way, and so you kind of suck." And folding back on Bill Dixon talking about "white people music": technique, especially when it's allied to tradition, when we define our relationship to that tradition, are we actually defining our relationship to authority? A lot of the contemporary music that I really like involves de-skilling, and so the Frederic Rzewski piece that we're performing on Sunday definitely has an aspect of that, although weirdly it's like de-skilling for very skilled people. At the same time, for myself because I can't untrain myself, I know I will always have training in reserve, so it's like, "Well yeah, I can play this if I want to" but I choose not to at the same time. Does anybody think along those lines?

Jeremy: It's funny how, and I hope everyone will forgive me for speaking to this . . . in high school there was a hall at Prince George Senior Secondary between the band room and the drama room, and our band teacher Jens Jensen was so cool he would let the guitar students who were what he called the advanced group, play out in the hall and just really hang out. Some of us chose to use that time to skip class and smoke cigarettes and stuff, and others of us used that time to play and jam with one another. There was an orthodoxy that asserted itself in that structure, but what was very funny about it was that orthodoxy was based on opposing nonconformity, and I developed a term for what I perceived as the faction who were advancing opposing nonconformity, the "Slayer Players." So, the Slayer Players were the rebels in the leather jackets and they all dressed

and looked and acted and talked exactly the same. And part of what was so amazing to me about it was that they would be playing their Dimebag Darrell riffs absolutely perfectly and with correct tone and everything and every detail exactly right, and then talking about how these guys were the greatest guitar players in the world. What was interesting to me about that was, it's like all these dudes in high school are as good as the greatest guitar players in the world. As a relationship to authority, it was like authority formed itself in this kind of cliquish, nasty way in that if you couldn't play fast, all the Slayer Players would ignore you, but if you played fast but did something they didn't like, then they would put effort into ignoring you. If you did the thing that they all did, then you were okay. But there was a hierarchy within that, and the dude who was the fastest and most correct would be the best dude and everyone would have to imitate that.

Audience Member #2: How different is that than every single jazz sax player learning note for note "Giant Steps," how different is that? You know, because I think that's bizarre as someone who loves John Coltrane, we're talking about something called technique here, and we're also talking about taking the time to sit down with that record and write it out, transcribe it note for note, which is bizarre. It's not that different. When we talk about technique, ask questions about our relationship to authority, and we think about what exactly does it mean to take a recording, transcribe that, memorize it, use that as a basis for technique, it all kind of folds over on itself and I don't really feel like I have an answer to anything that we're talking about.

Catherine: The "Giant Steps" thing is creepy. And that's the perfect example of how utterly meaningless technique can be because how many people have you heard playing "Giant Steps?" And granted, "Giant Steps" is the same thing chorus after chorus after chorus, there's not a lot in there. When Coltrane played it, it was very astounding because for him it was an expressive tool. For someone else doing it, it's an academic exercise, and that's not music. So, you're dealing with two different things. When people become attached to it as a thing they can do, that's something else that I don't really understand. What's more interesting even is the Coltrane solos from the album Cannonball Adderley Quintet & John Coltrane in Chicago, do you know that one? And if you listen on "Limehouse Blues," Coltrane was superimposing "Giant Steps" changes and it was a few months before he recorded "Giant Steps," and he's just plugging them in, playing them all over "Limehouse Blues," which is really fun, and he sounds like he's having fun with it, he's getting comfortable, he's experimenting. He's a player that I really enjoy because within probably a chorus or two of hearing what he is doing, you can pretty much tell the year that he made it. He evolved so much and so fast, it's mind bending. You can say "Okay, that's right around the time that Blue Train was recorded, this one is right around Giant Steps, and that's more interesting, than learning to balance a beach ball on your nose and flap your flippers—that's what that is when you learn to play the solo really fast and like him. I don't know, I'm sorry I can't answer that because I've never understood it myself.

Jonathon: I think I understand learning to play "Giant Steps" . . . I guess there are people that just sit down and obsessively copy that stuff, the Dimebag Darrell imitator type, but then there's also the process of, not everybody does this, but you transcribe a song and then you leave it and eventually things will show up in your technique. So, there's the physical training aspect of it. But what I'm talking about is what you're doing with intention and what you're doing with the material. So, in my case I like Steve Lacy, and so I try to play Steve Lacy

things only as kind of a foundation for a technical system that that I want. But then I'm not trying to make sure my attack or pitch is right on each note of "Giant Steps," which I haven't played for 20 years, and I don't think I could anymore. I can play one of the patterns, but the rest of them I just can't.

Audience Member #5: That was right along the lines actually of what I was going sort of ask about. I'm not a musician, I'm a writer, and there's a writing practice which is copying out, literally copying, word for word chapters of people's books just so you know how it feels in your hand to write Mary Oliver. And there's a way of listening that is somewhere in between active and passive; there's a way of internalizing it maybe, however, again with intention. If the intention is to produce more Mary Oliver poetry, then you're either going to be better or worse at that, but if the intention is to somehow hear Mary Oliver even deeper than you were when you were just reading it and find an increase in our vocabulary for how we express ourselves viscerally. If it's about expressing ourselves viscerally as opposed to reproducing something with accuracy, if it's about creating something personal as opposed to be that photocopier machine, then that's something I get. I don't know that familiarizing ourselves with technique or tradition necessarily takes away from visceral expression so long as it continues to be our intention. I think T.S. Eliot has an essay about this that I think is really apt and says a lot of these same things that familiarity and tradition actually can enhance our ability as long as we can embody the tradition and then let it go, then it can become part of the vocabulary instead of a framework of response.

Stanley: On that subject, the "Giants Steps" subject, you go through all the effort to learn "Giant Steps," you can play at tempo, you can play every note right, you can play every rhythm right, no one's going to mistake you for John Coltrane. You could play along with the thing and hit every note bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, no one's going to mistake you for John Coltrane, but chances are you're going take that material and misread it, and you're going take his message and get it wrong, but you're going get it wrong at such a high level of proficiency, chances are that you're going come out with something interesting. That's the same with writing out Mary Oliver. No one's going confuse you with Mary Oliver, but if you were to go through that for a year, when you went to do your thing, you would misread and misunderstand the information you were gi—what the hell's "Giant Steps" mean? Who understands "Giant Steps?" No one understands "Giant Steps." And so all the people who take all that time to absorb all that Coltrane, and all that "Giant Steps," and all that Mary Oliver, when they finally get up to do their thing, it's going come out wrong. And in the best possible circumstances, what came out wrong will be pretty cool, and I think that's how literature and music and art has developed, it has been a series of misreadings. And I didn't make that up either, that's Harold Bloom, but I don't think we can copy someone else, you know, and I don't think we can play like someone else. We can come pretty close, and when it comes time for you to do your thing, and if you intend to be like someone else, you will fail.

Nick: It makes me think the Dimebag Darrell imitators are probably also aping the look very closely with the hair and the right t-shirt and everything, which leads one to believe that probably, really in their heart of hearts, they want to be Dimebag Darrell. They want to actually be that person, and that's what you're touching upon too is that if someone is not John Coltrane but just wants to be John Coltrane, you're not going to do it.

Stanley: And it seems like the more you want to be it, the further away you're going to be

from it.

Nick: Yeah, as opposed to just being in touch enough with yourself to want to just actually be yourself and live your own experience and your own emotions, then technique can result in something cool like you said.

Audience Member #5: There's this way that by no matter what you do, you end up expressing yourself viscerally, it's just that in expressing yourself viscerally could what you're wanting to express be how far you are from John Coltrane? Is that what you're wanting to show the world? Are you wanting to show everybody just how well you fail at being John Coltrane, and as soon as you have something else to express you can use that vocabulary for something forward?

Dave: I think the idea of repetition and reiteration is really interesting because, all that being said, that is a way that you learn stuff. The thing about transcription is that's become a very standard thing to do for jazz students, and I've given my private students instructions to go transcribe stuff, it is the best way to learn your training because you can reinforce what you're learning right away. But not with the intention to go out and play it on a gig, like, no please don't do that. The thing is though, if you look for music on YouTube, it's all repetition. You can see 100 people playing the "Giant Steps" solo, and you can see everybody doing this guitar solo, and death metal drum covers, and death metal vocal covers with the backing track and all that. I don't quite get why you'd want to show people this, I mean you could show your teacher and your cool uncle or something. I don't quite understand how people can have 100,000 hits doing that but . . .
Audience Member #2: It's why I watch people at karaoke. I'm fascinated by it. I'm like "What is going on here?" It's really interesting, interesting in that horrible sociological way you talked about in terms of the listening. How the hell does this guy get up here and this guy not be heard? It's interesting in that way because there's something happening around the idea of celebrity, and repetition, and technique, and listening, and music, and recording, that's happening in that space, that's really strange.

Jose: For me, from being from a very classical background, the relationship that a lot of classical musicians have to recordings, and even as students, comes from what has proven to be successful. So, if this guy played this way and is successful, and sold records, you know as classical music things sell, a couple thousand, then this guy's going to try to really sound like previously successful musicians, I mean to the point that even Dorothy DeLay at Julliard would tell the kids, "Dude, why are you sounding like Pinchas Zukerman? Why are you sounding like Itzhak Perlman? You've been listening to him a lot, stop that." You find security in the things that have been proven successful, and I think that's what we sometimes are trying to find. What is the recipe for success? And I think that we can go very high up in what I call the very basic element. As in, like, we want to feel secure and feel that what we're going to do is going to be liked, as simple as that. See this skill? Do you like it? Please. And it's very basic. Few humans, I think, can go beyond that basic thing in their core. I think in our core, we want to communicate and be liked to a certain degree. I think for me, it goes to that basic element: security, finding what has worked.

The other thing I was going to talk about when you guys were talking about transcriptions, is, that's how Bach learned, too. Do what Vivaldi wrote, copy it eleven million times, But as a classical musicians, they weren't listening to recordings, they were copying from their contemporaries, not from hundreds and hundreds of years in the past. I think that the problem we have in classical music is that we have, okay,

the 1500s, the 1600s, the 1700s, the 1800s, the 1900s, and in the 20th century we don't do much, and after that it's nebulous. So we have this horrible hierarchy of what is valid in classical music, and then we worship the past so much we become desensitized. Lucille, a friend of mine, actually said, "Oh, the music of another male, dead composer." I never actually heard that inside me, but it's true. To be honest, I've only played probably once, music written by a female composer who was still alive, just once. The rest, and I've been playing since I was very young, it's been just males. And it's an interesting thing that we don't find that even appalling. I was doing an interview the other day about a female composer concert and they asked, "Oh, what do you think about this, that's great that you have this idea of doing female composers," and I'm like, No! It's appalling, it's horrible that we have to actually call a concert a "female composer concert." And it comes to the same thing, right, to find security in things that have proven successful or that we've been told are successful, and in the classical world, we still perpetrate the patriarchal things about being awesome, being successful. I think we're constantly perpetuating it.

Audience Member #6: It's really freaking me out how strongly I've seen the correlation is with every single thing that you've talked about, and I'm thinking there's an analogy towards writing. I don't really feel strongly toward spirituality and religion, and I was just wondering if anyone else has any thoughts on that?

[Pause; laughter amongst panel members]

Audience Member #6: Well, I thought we already talked about politics, so, even if nothing else, I'm sure I'll have a good conversation with Jeremy and Peter afterwards.

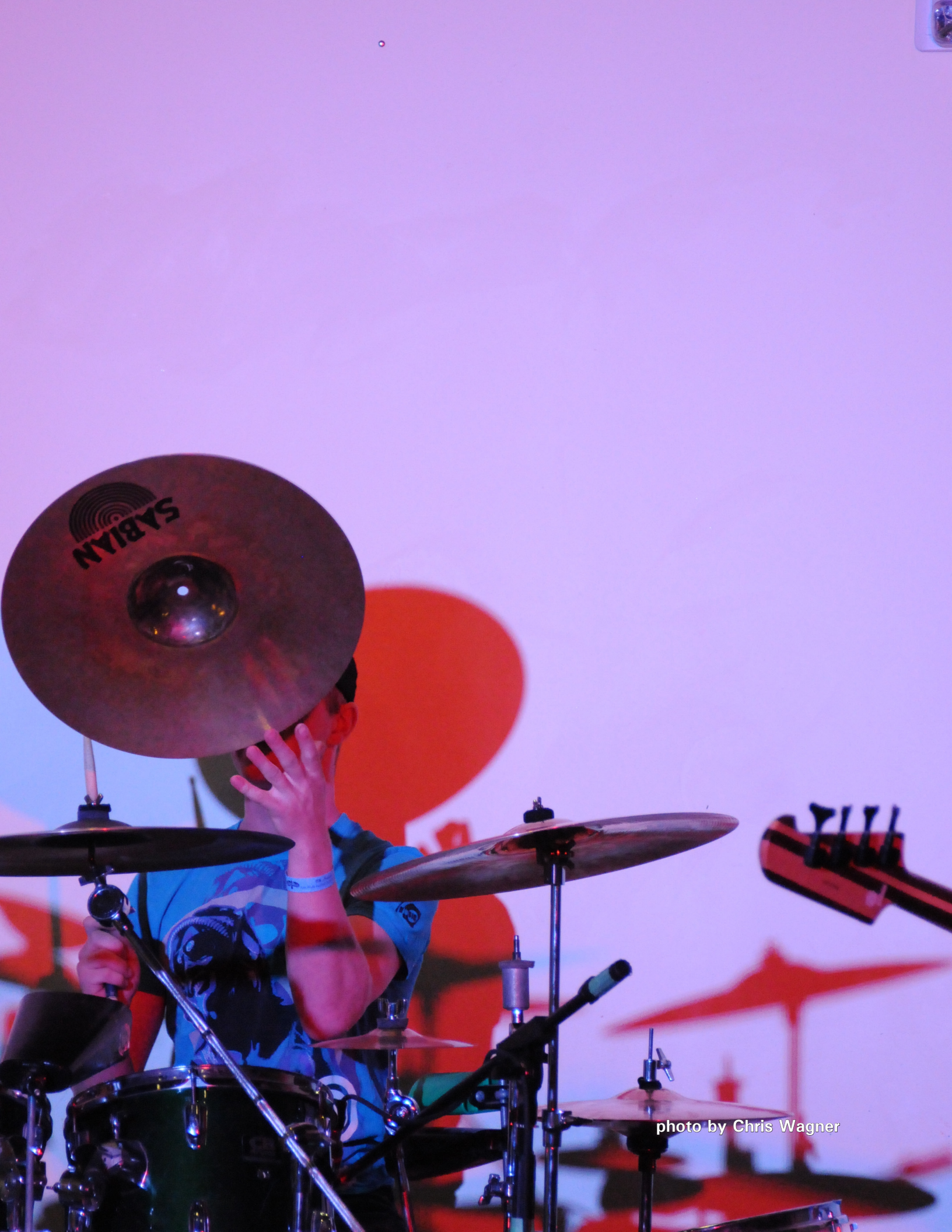
Catherine: I'm just curious what the correlation is, more specifically.

Audience Member #6: Theology, and orthodoxy, and organized religion, and all that kind of strict rules kind of stuff versus the experiential, the more emotional, the mysterious side of what isn't usually even wrapped up into what we consider religion, but is really the foundation of what religion is really all about, if that makes any sense.

Dave: Well, in the sense that you're putting a map of meanings on how you behave . . . First of all I'm pretty much a stone cold atheist, although I'm very interested in religion as text, and how it works. I think of Wittgenstein saying ethics and aesthetics are one in the same, which I'm going to probably misread as saying that the way you create art, and the way you position yourself in the world with aesthetics, these are decisions that you should actually make with moral force. I think that when you are playing with people, back and forth, you are kind of projecting your world. I have these moments where I'm very utopian around people free improvising together, and sometimes I can stay in that for a while, and then I get all pissed off.

Audience Member #6: That's religion right there.

Audience Member #5: When he spoke of orthodoxy, if it's the measurement tool we want to be using in measuring success, how well are we following the rules versus how much are we listening to spirit, and the correlation to that maybe being how much are we listening to what it is that our voice, capital "v" voice, how much are we just repeating something because it meets our security needs. I think spirituality asks us to leave, the whole idea of faith it asks us to leave what is secure and to leap out into what is true, and so there is something there about . . .



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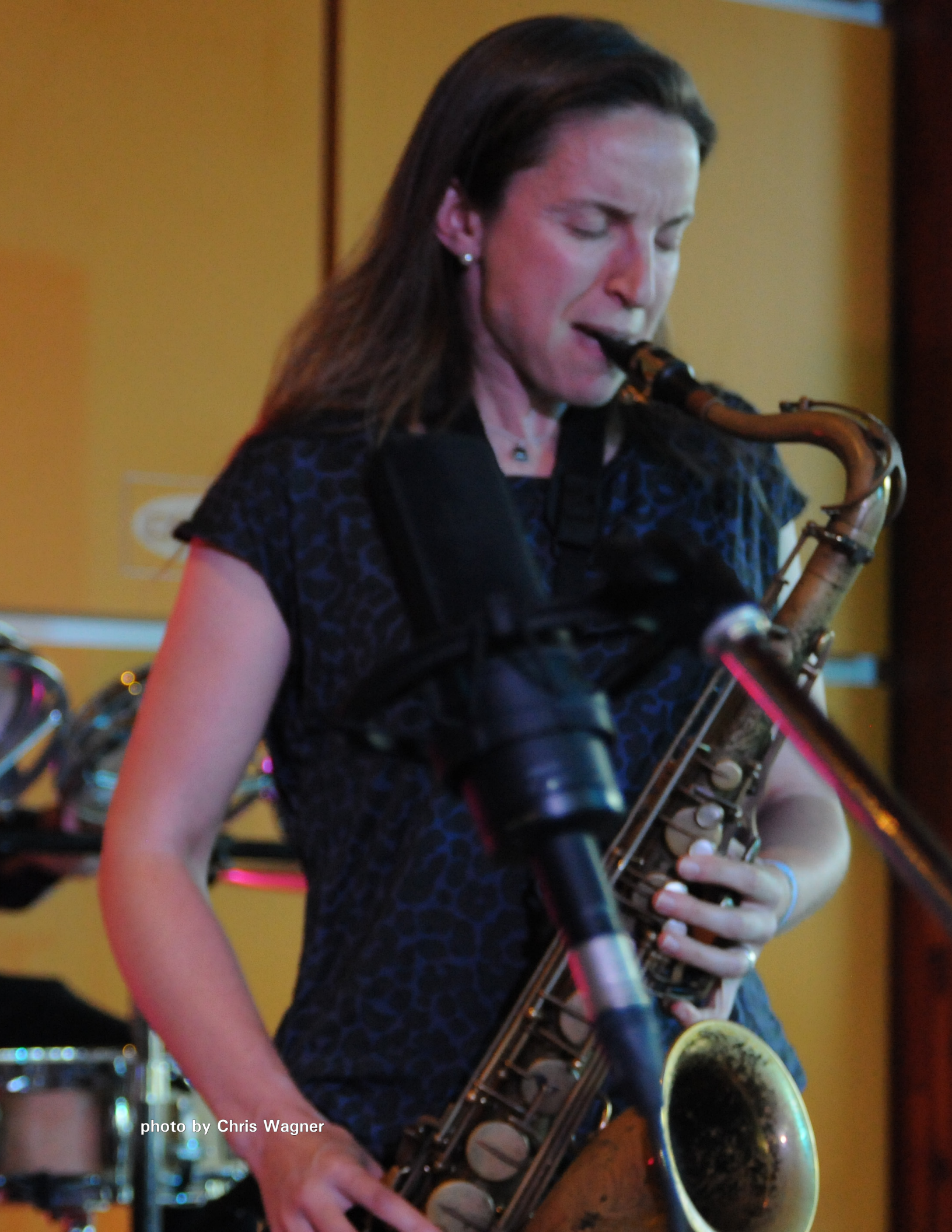
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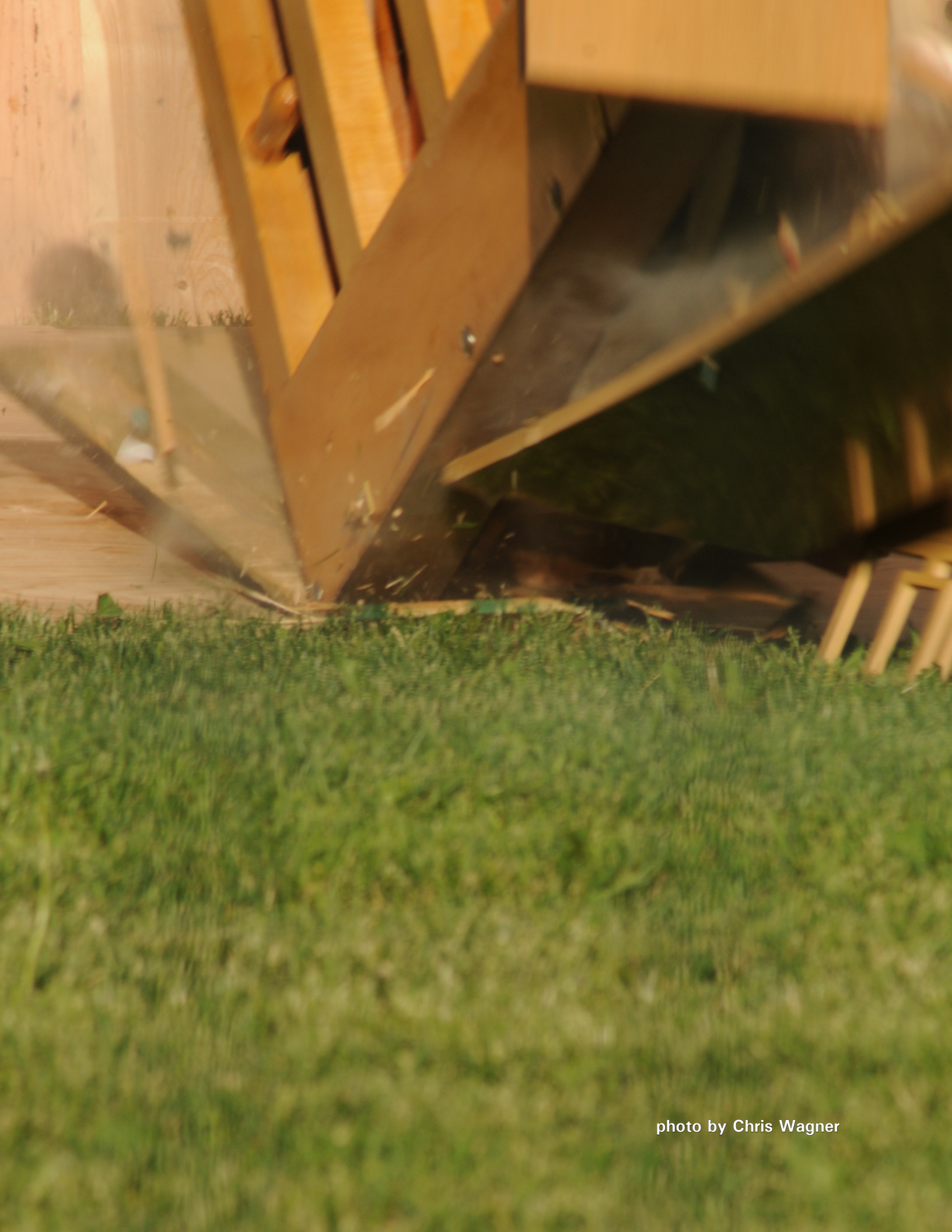

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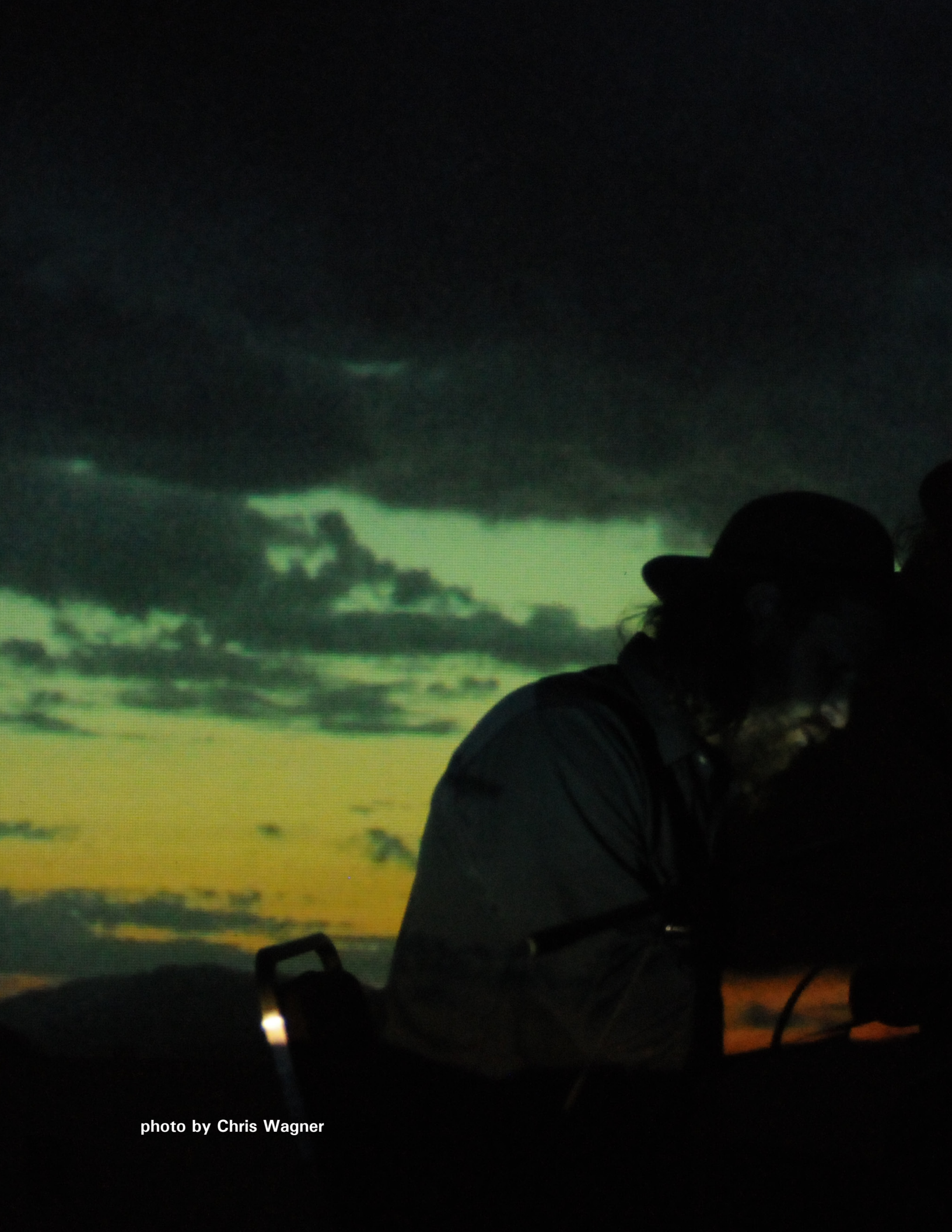

photo by Chris Wagner

Jonathon: You can have your spirituality, but if you don't have technique you can't play with other people.

Audience Member #6: You have to learn technique, just as you need to have some understanding of theology in order to make your relationship with God, or however you approach that communication.

Audience Member #4: There's technique for purposes . . . the technique has an end in itself. Getting locked up in the technique, like saying the prayers, or using the technique as a way to access something beyond that.

Audience Member #3: Because in art, whether it's music, or painting, or anything, yes you need technique and all these different tools to use and make decisions, but the basis underwriting all of that is there are no rules. You can do whatever you want, there are no rules.

Audience Member #6: There's something too in there about authority, maybe you can talk about that.

Jonathon: I guess I agree in spirit there are no rules, but if you don't have enough rules you can't play with people. There are rules because music is social, and I think it's a false position to say there are no rules because there are rules on the level of interaction in the musical situation.

Audience Member #1: That's the same thing as saying that time is arbitrary, right, because we made up time, the concept of time, but we all agree that it's a thing. We're getting too metaphysical.

Jeremy: I don't think we are.

Audience Member #5: Is it possible though, you say it's a false position to say there are no rules and that we need the rules in order to communicate with one another. So, is it true though that a child who is encountering an instrument for the first time is incapable of communicating anything with that instrument?

Dave: Well, that's not true at all.

Jeremy: No, I don't think that's implied by that either. If people will permit me an attempt at this. The interesting thing about "There are no rules" and then playing with other people is, and I'll resort to Richard Rorty's pragmatism here, which is: There are no rules and yet the suffering of other people is undeniable, and so do we... drum circle?

[Pause; audience laughter]

Jeremy: The suffering for me from a drum circle is something. So, are there rules, or do we simply have to acknowledge that our actions do seem to have some kind of effect, and it's in some ways apparently more or less predictable to the point that we do have to be responsible for imagining the results of our actions?

There are rules, maybe, because others' suffering at least matters, at least that has to matter. So, there's a rule, there's a limit, and you can extrapolate more than one thing from that limit, but it seems like it's suggestive. Other people suffer, and this alone I will accept as a limit. Now, there are all these other limits that I can bring to it that aren't given, but my intelligence makes me responsible to see that it extends beyond just that bare fact. Like, if I step on somebody's toe, then that's a problem because of this fact, and so where do I situate the stepping on toes. What do they say in Dumbo? "Elephants got no feelings, they're made of rubber." And it's this horrible moment. The circus people who are tending the elephants, they say "Elephants got no feelings, they're made of rubber," and we're identifying with Dumbo there

because it's like Dumbo does have feelings, and it's undeniable, you can see it! And there's this whole ethical kind of like . . . It's up to us to decide how we're going to react to that, but there is something there that matters. So that's sort of where I'm at.

Audience Member #1: So bringing that back around to technique?

Jose: The whole thing about technique—it comes from, this is from my point of view—desire. Do you desire to communicate or you not desire to communicate? Do you desire to play with others or do you don't care?

Dave: Anarchist.

Jose: Do you think it is not necessary playing with others, and you will still communicate well. But it doesn't matter what you do, and every interaction that we have there is a way because that's why you're not talking over what I'm talking. So, we can say that there are no rules but there is something that is keeping us here wearing pants. There is something here that is why I'm not wearing heels. I mean, it's been very interesting because I've been doing a series of paintings of just clothing. When I painted a dress, I painted a white dress, I had tons of emails from people telling me, "What's wrong with you? Are you transitioning?" And I'm like, it's just a dress, I painted a white dress. But, like it or not, everything has a meaning, and those meanings we structure, we think we can call it "rules" or "technique" because otherwise we would just not do anything, it would just be too chaotic to function. But it comes form the desire to either make it function or not make it function from my point of view. And religion, when I was trying to become Buddhist, my master spent—I don't remember, like 40 minutes—explaining to all of us how to do the correct bowing, so we can do our 10,000s of them every summer. And I'm like, "Whoa, not for me," right. But that was very important for that tradition, and for them you had to pass that skill. And I think, like it or not, we belong to our own pods, pods of anarchists, pods of people that respect this, pods that don't, and they do exist and we coexist because we're following some sort of pattern or rule that we need to in order to communicate, and we let it. Unless you don't want to, then you don't do it, and we have people that don't do it.

Stanley: At the same time, winners always cheat and cheaters always win. True or false? I'm right.

Jose: And I think that's the part of understanding the rules even when you don't seek them.
Audience Member #3: But that means that it's open to your ability to push yourself in any direction that you want to go. So, as soon as you pick up an instrument, or I pick up a canvas and a brush, I put some parameters or rules to what I'm doing. But there may be other areas, I mean, when I painted all the time, if I got halfway through a painting and I knew what it would look like I would never finish that painting because I know what it's going to look like. I'm onto the next one, and I always took whatever drove me crazy in the last painting and that's where I'd started out on the next one. So, I was pushing myself as hard as I could, and then it was exciting, and then it was interesting. And you're reading, and you're trying to find out about other cultures and other people's perception, and music takes a while to understand. All these different things were changing how I make the marks on that canvas or how I'm perceiving things when I'm out walking, and it's exciting. And there's no rules. You can push yourself anywhere you want to go.

Jeremy: I think we could probably continue all night. Thank you all so much.

The Present is Concerned • Carly Stewart

She dyes the majority of her garments navy and black and lays them overtop newspapers in the bath-tub. While washing her face she discovers a pimple on the edge of her hair-line. An affront to her plain face—not unlike an experience earlier in the day: the first bite of an apple, the inner flesh about to turn, a woody mush that filled the holes left from her extracted wisdom teeth. Wiping the spot with a scalding cloth, then using a sullied fingernail, she scratches the head off. The cuticle of her forefinger and the ridge under her nail now dyed in perfect pitch with her garments. Pus emerges from the pimple. She wets it again. A pinprick of blood. She half expects it to be navy.

This sky, cloudless, expansive. People on the sidewalk stuff hands in pockets, the day dark. Winded coupons flap by. The air brisk, a welcomed change from the scent of dye in her apartment. One step, and then the others, integral to changing her mood.

All in ocean blue: three guys, bearded and scruffy, sit on the sidewalk. One holds a fishing rod, a rusty can attached to its end. An untarnished strip flashes from the tin. She nods.

Through her indigo shirt, sweater, coat, she feels a lifting in her chest. Four steps away from the guys, an albino man eyes her. She suppresses a laugh while crossing the street.

She touches the pimple's place. It throbs—on and off. Whenever she puts a finger to it, small flashes of heat expel. A kid with a yo-yo, mid-swing, stops and stares. Another jump beneath her ribcage. The yo-yo stalls in mid-rotation. She enters the café.

On the shelves inside, a collection of antique coffee grinders reflect a myriad of blue; the barista attends in monochrome garb—her hat, her scarf, her shirt, mirrored in the ancient objects. The woman waits in line. A man sitting at the bar sketches. Perched beside him with a drink, a pastry, she opens the paper she doesn't read, more interested in eavesdropping, in watching the people walk outside. She picks at the pimple.

Through the window, everything's navy—lamp-posts, cement, queue of cars, the overcoats of pedestrians. She's struck again by the appearance of the kid with the yo-yo, his bleached hair gelled and pointed at the sky. Her sternum tickles.

The barista mentions a slew of jazz musicians. The sketching man nods blankly, then says, "Sometimes when I'm near a window, I feel like I'm on a train and everything's moving past." To more fully consider this, the woman pulls her attention from the paper she isn't reading. Outside coffee cups are forced under the cars waiting for the light to turn.

On the platform, yesterday's leftover Metro News flies by with the rush of the train. Here and there, a single sheet is stuck to the pavement: glued to a wad of gum, a bit of frozen spit, an icy spill from a bottle, a leak in the roof.

When her train arrives she sits next to an adolescent mother with a child in a stroller. His drooling mouth agape. Equal gaps between teeth. With each stop, the train car fills. She picks at the pimple, taps a foot to the music in her ears; one, then the other. Legs in the air, the child mimics her movements. His blonde hair springs. A bubbling in her torso. Light gradually expels from her forehead. The child watches. Intent.

At the zoo stop, mangled cardboard boxes whip up with the rushing train. As they waft down the

light grows stronger, roping through the train's roof. She stretches her neck. The child mirrors her, though his head swivels more dramatically. She begins to ape him—his feet now limp. She makes her sneakers play dead. He continues to goggle. Eyes beaming.

The train starts again. She smiles at the staring child. His face open, rarely blinking. She begins to tap her feet on top of someone's lost to do list—girlish print jumping off a page. Intermittent, the light expels from her hair-line. Pulsing, a ray, a beam, then streams. Muted silver bands grow straight from her head. The child gurgles, bubbling spit. Starts kicking his feet. Giggles. A man grins at the child then uses his hands to act as shutters opening and closing in front of his face. Someone crumples the wrapping from a sandwich, drops it on the floor.

The child's eyes are unyielding when the light tunnels from her forehead. The train stops. Another mother boards, carrying a white haired infant. This one is sleeping. Its eyes open revealing black starfish irises. It screams, startled by the light. Shrill cries and all those little eyes, in her direction.

D-25 • Andrew Burton

Those poems of four AM are hounding me
Dragging me from lucid dreams
Of D when we were twenty five
Sweating naked
On the kitchen floor
Our bodies laced in rhythm
Point and counterpoint
Those poems are pushing me
To draw high minded visions
Imagery of heart and soul
Of life and loss
And ancient spirits
Speaking through the trees
Those poems have no regard
For the feel of skin on skin
The taste of her
The laugh when something felt too good
Or tickled her some special way
That smile she gave
In sexual conspiracy
Those poems of four AM must find their place
And call to me in some café
Or on a bench in river park
A place to write that does not dare
To dream of D
When we were twenty five

In Dreams • Andrew Burton

Those distant mountains shadowing the highway heading west
Dreams that come only at night
Stories passed around the campfire
With joints and unknown wine
Hitching home in the rain
The boy puts his jeans in the bottom drawer
And buys a paper
Want ads without wants
The girl in the red dress marries twice for love
Her daughter moves away at seventeen
The Stratocaster in the living room falls out of tune
And sinks into the basement
The runner trades the run for single malt
The wind carries the bite of another campfire
Somewhere along the river
Thunderheads threaten rain
Shadows lengthen and the sun settles
Over the distant mountains in the west

Spring Island • Andrew Burton

Off into the west the sea lifts
Running high in a following breeze
Holly sits alone by the railing
Wandering in dreams of tiny green crabs
Slick with salt
Struggling to be free

Take a moment • Andrew Burton

In this harsh winter of bleak promises
Of desire abandoned in the rush of the day
A clown rose from a whiskey bottle on 42nd street
He came not of his own accord
But answered a call
A grinding need to let go
To spray the face of hapless truth
From a plastic daisy on a broad lapel
To sweep a spot of light to the centre of the floor
And fold balloons into animals

All Dust Settles • Josephine Boxwell

False brightness floods polished stone with the flick of a switch. Her early morning eyes scream. Between the side entrance and the cleaners' cupboard, she slips into her rhythm. Black hair pulled back, her skinny arm pushes a mop. No birdsong with the first light, but the quick clicks of soles arriving for work. The floor is already dirtied. She mops up traces of sand, sulphur and heavy metal secreted from creaseless uniforms. The marble must always gleam.

The floor is art, full of coloured veins with tiny glinting crystals, and it is vast. She moves up and down, up and down, not quickly but in straight rows that remind her of her grandfather's crops. She appreciates the exquisite stone, but she longs for green.

The government warns against exposure to the outside air. Blue skies are for dreams and advertising. Entire tower blocks disappear beneath the smog, but the marble must always gleam. As consistent as the ticking clock, the bank receives and releases bodies dropping dirt. They don't see her; she is village dust, but she picks up everything.

Mr. Lí moves confidently through the glass. Smart black suit and red silk tie. Young for his position. She admires his pristine shoes, barely touched by the outside world. Her eyes follow him discreetly. The manager greets him and directs him towards a private office. Mr. Lí's voice is loud; his sound carries across the marble. His face contorts as he complains of the exorbitant cost of removing dust from his enormous buildings. The manager nods in sympathy. The exorbitant cost of workers with mops.

Mr. Lí and the manager seal themselves inside the office. She is travelling towards them as they leave. The private room is empty now; the door ajar. She moves a fraction faster, and is careful not to glance over too soon, or for too long. She flicks her eyes over to the doorway and spots a bottle on the desk, foreign words stuck onto it. The tellers pass comments back and forth, and she collects them as she freshens up the stone beside their long counter. Mr. Lí has just returned from a business trip abroad. She cannot imagine being so high up in the sky. The gift is high quality, one of the older tellers explains, and very expensive. Like marble, she thinks. Her piece of rented floor is concrete, not that she needs it to glisten. Sometimes she dreams her roof is the night sky. There is no darkness in the city, not like in the countryside where the blackness is decorated with stars. The sky here fades from a pale grey to a purplish hue dotted with electric lights.

Mr. Qín is an old grumbler. Wealthy, too. Shiny, speckled head. He grumbles about his persistent cough, the economy, the sheer number of migrants overwhelming his city. He holds his tongue to stare at Ms. Chéng as she approaches another counter. Ms. Chéng is not unaware; her eyes contract slightly. She's older, but still beautiful. The tellers often chat about her stylish clothing. The girl's eyes follow the curves of her elegance down to the blue-grey satin around her feet.

Ms. Chéng leaves suddenly. The mop is already plunging forwards, but she cuts straight into its path. The girl retreats and yanks the mop back with her. She holds her breath, narrowly avoiding contact with Ms. Chéng's costly heels. Ms. Chéng frowns. The girl stands under her scrutiny; paralysed. Over at the counter, Mr. Qín has noticed. She hopes he doesn't interfere. This is her only field; these gleaming rows her food. She feels hot under his glare, so she turns away quickly as Ms. Chéng did, hoping he will lose interest. Ms. Chéng's heels clip the floor and she is gone. The girl avoids all eyes and focuses on

ploughing the dust. She steadies her hands and moves in long, firm strides across the marble. Hundreds of miles from home; she will travel as far again across this floor.

The girl spends her day collecting factory pollutants and shifting specks of desert. She watches the carcinogens dance in the light as she works. She likes them, the way they drift casually through the rays. They don't respond to fraught customers. They don't judge or command or demand. The little particles are peaceful, and they are everything.

She is pleased that irritable coughs and state of the art tower blocks all become dust in time. She never complains about her closed-up throat or the death of blue skies. The dust settles here, in this bank, and it gives her work. In the end, she will mop them all up, their little pieces of skin and lipstick, silk and paper, leather and rice and lust and fear. She knows they are all afraid, of not being. They climb and climb as though they will live on, to be remembered for as long as the stars they have removed from the night, but like the girl and her mop, they will break into earth and be forgotten.

The Aero • David Miller

old shacks, boom chains,
pylons jut above a rising sea
held booms of spruce, bound for war

on shore lie giant Sitkas
as fallen soldiers
they remain buried amongst
bolts, shackles, rusted trucks and boilers

a battle raged here
where locomotives of steam
like herds of Clydesdales
yarded loads from Skidegate Lake
to Moresby Bay

I follow the abandoned grade
deep into once reclaimed land
stepping lightly
the moss underneath
is but a blanket
tucked around scarred tissue

as if an early explorer
I'm on full alert watching, listening
conscious of each step
not to cause disturbance
and give position away
not for fear of enemy ambush
but for black-tail
imported aliens
introduced 1900's
like missionaries they multiplied tenfold

Yet I still hear a whistle blow
Aero timber on the rail
bore from the killing fields abroad
now in ruins lie abandoned, dismantled, forgotten
where giants began life
in days of Columbus

Now where the hell is one of those missionaries?

Righting Injustice • Dee Horne

This arm is sacred
w/rites
injustices,
asks questions,
awakens ancestors.

Rights injustices
with the left.
Rights what's wrong.

This arm
writes in
justice.

Rabbits • Graham Lazarovich

My dad brought a .22 over to the farm. With a scope on it, and we shot at some beer cans.

At the sound of the shot, the dog leaps off the deck onto the grass and barks. "Oh, she'll get right in the way now" Dad says. I look through the scope to see her frantically barking in all directions. "She just really likes guns."

Woof Woof Woof!

Every time you shoot a can you have to yell at the dog, go down on the grass and corral her back on to the porch.

"Diamond come! Diamond COME!"

Coralling her back on the porch, "You do as you're told!" he shouts. She's an old dog. I remember picking her out and taking her home from Natexa's place down island. Just a licking, snuggling, whining little black ball of fur and warmth.

Now scruffy and bearded, mostly black still, but greyscale in some places, some white here and there. But still the same dog. Kind and loving and smart. A people dog. Always barked at nothing.

"Yeah, I got it for a hundred fifty bucks. We gotta keep the rabbits down" he says, cradling a bottle of beer in one hand and a smoke in the other. My dad is getting old now too, grey's now almost completely defeated his formerly black head of hair. Same old stance, relaxed in a plastic chair, legs crossed, cigarette.

"And the fuckin' deer; they were in the fuckin' raspberries again. Last year we didn't get raspberries until first frost. I think they're gettin' in over in that corner..." Puff, puff; drink, drink; belch.

"So if you see a deer, fuckin' tag it. If you can take it down, great, but if it gets away it'll die in the woods and a bear'll get it, or the vultures or whatever. Somethin'll get it." Then he goes inside and starts talking about something else.

Later he shows me how the gun, in a case, will go deep in the closet and he'll leave a few rounds in a little clay pot with the keys to the trigger lock.

"But what if there's a revolution?!" I say, and he comes back immediately by showing me where the key to the safe is, and inside the safe there are various kinds of weapons and munitions. How did my dad get a gun licence?

*

I sit at the kitchen table writing in my book after lunch. My dad has made a bacon sandwich and sits outside on the bench eating it with his ever-present can of Diet Death.

He's always talking to the dog. She sees he has food so seats herself next to him transfixed on the sandwich as though hypno-

tized.

"Are you moochin' Diamond?" he says in a campy voice, "Are you mooching, you little moocher?" I mean, she's 96 in dog years.

*

My annoyance thrusts me back to our old North Van townhouse and brown shag carpet. A blue haze of cigarette smoke fills the room from waist to head height and my dad's second wife sits on her chair with a cigarette in one hand and a book in the other, staring into it. I'm playing Mario on the floor.

"Dad, don't let her mooch!" my sister commands from the dining room table, looking over from her binder with fierce green eyes. "DON'T LET HER MOOCH OR SHE'LL NEVER LEARN!" she shouts. Little Diamond, black as night but for her tell-tale little white diamond marking in the middle of her chest, wags her tail and stares to his sandwich, turkey and Miracle Dressing.

He's on the couch, "Are you a little moocher Diamond?" he says in his baby-talk voice. "Are you a little moocher? Misha says I shouldn't let you mooch, what do you think? I think you're awful cute" he says, then takes the last bite of his sandwich, leaving the last corner where he gripped the white bread. She licks the air and wags her tail, inching even closer to him. Then he gives her the bread and says "now don't do it again you little moocher."

"Daaa-aaad!"...

*

He gives her the last of his sandwich and says "there you go you little mooch", then rises and stomps into the house, belching, and announces, "In case you didn't notice, Diamond doesn't really like her food. What I do is pour a little bacon grease on her kibbly and she'll usually eat it. Or if you have any food left over then mix it in there real good with her food and she'll probably eat it. The little bugger tries to pick it all out though. Are you a little bugger, dog?" He patronizes her, "you don't like your dog food do you dog?"

She's in the kitchen now, following him as he puts the bread away and paces toward the door, head down eyes up. She pauses for a moment to contort her hind leg forward and scratch like a fiend like she always does. "Yeah I better hit the road if I'm gonna catch the seven," he says, looking to the clock over the stove, "I'll see you in a week or two. Give me a call if you need anything."

I don't eat much meat. I'll eat fish. I fish. And I've been picking up some range-fed venison at the Old Country Market lately. I don't touch that factory farmed stuff. I remember one time my baba saying "your dad bought you some vegetation burgers, so they're in the freezer when you want one."

"And oh, Vic's got rabbits so he's gonna come borrow the .22 some time."

You have to shoot the rabbits? Or they'll eat

all your carrots? Your other plants? What happens if you let the bunnies roam free?

There's something about sitting on the deck shooting cans with a .22. When my dad left for the city I took his last Diet Death and put it on a fence post, far away by the potato patch. I fired and fired but it was too far. I hit the fencepost a half dozen times. One time I was aiming and then came a deer, moseying along behind the potatoes. I looked at it through the scope. A serene, vegetable eating being. It disappeared behind the hump and I resumed taking aim at the Diet Death.

I decided to stalk the can.

Moving out by the red currants I spotted a bunny to my right. I turned, but its psychic sensors must have been on and it bounded into the weeds.

Undaunted, I shifted to a good spot and rested the barrel against the fence. With the silver can glistening in the falling light between my crosshairs, I pulled the trigger and a metal slug zipped through the air into the soda can causing it to gloriously gush and spin into the air and fall, filling me with glee.

With rounds yet, I crossed through the gate and into the potato patch. The hunter. There's something about walking around with a weapon. We were all hunters a hundred thousand years ago. Diamond follows.

I cross into the blueberries, over the ditch, and the still dog follows. Rows of blueberry plants with little green future berries. At the end of the row, by gum, out comes a bunny into plain view. Just sitting there thinking about stuff. I get on one knee, hone in, raise my rifle and look through the scope.

Woof Woof Woof! Diamond bounds in front of me, obscuring the shot. "Diamond, Come! COME HERE!"

She doesn't. She just looks sideways at me like I don't know what I'm talking about and launches into another fit of barking.

I rise and stomp up to her, she moves away but I overtake her, talking sternly. The rabbit is gone, but I march on, telling Diamond to Heal. She only half obeys, keeping her distance from me, pretending she can't hear, but sneaking sideways glances my way.

Over by the raspberries there's another bunny. I stop in my tracks and heighten my attention. I say "Heal!" and give a 'stay back' hand position. I raise the gun.

Woof Woof Woof! The rabbit doesn't move. "Diamond! COME! HERE!"

Woof Woof Woof! Right in the way. I grab a rock and pelt her the hind with it. "Diamond! Come!" She gives me an indignant look and paces in front of me. For a second I consider shooting at her, in the dirt in front of her. Then she might get the idea that I don't want her to stand in front of me barking because I'm trying to propel a metal slug through the air at terminal velocity into the flesh of a living animal other than

her. Of course, that would be stupid. And would defeat the purpose of getting mad.

So I stand up and yell at her more until the bunny runs away and then I catch up to her as she saunters away from me, bitter over being hit with a rock no doubt. And I carrall her toward the house. I say "Bad Dog!" and grab her by the scruff. She doesn't like this much. So I lean the gun against a fence and actually carry her over to her kennel. She moans and groans at being treated like a puppy. "Get in your doghouse!" I say after putting her down and she goes into her kennel. I shut the door and lock it.

I retrieve the gun and walk around by the wood shed down toward the barn. This part is a tractor path between two forested bits. And there's a bunny there, by the foot of a fir tree, near the burn pile. This one is white with brown spots. I take aim with a bit of nerves this time. He's in my wobbly crosshairs and I fire. ***Zang***.

He's hit. He flips over, kicks into the air thrice, rights himself and runs into the forest.

For those moments I gasp, cover my mouth and fill with regret. I briskly walk over to the scene. Shouldn't I run? There's no blood there, but I'm in a panic to find the bunny and shoot it so it doesn't suffer. I take to the the forest in a huff. This elderberry and underbrush and salmonberry, I'm making so much noise. This is just a sliver of forest between the path and the veggie garden. He's in there, I hear him move. I follow. This would be a good time to have a dog.

So I trudge out of the forest and speedwalk back to the house like a guy with a skytrain to catch. I let Diamond out and bring her back to the scene. I show her the spot where he was hit and say "where is he? Find 'im!" We look through the forest together. She doesn't seem to care too much. "Why am I looking here again?" she seems to say.

Eventually I give up. Am I going to keep hunting? Should I? The gun wants to hunt.

I walk over toward the barn, behind the barn, there's the raspberries again. I turn the corner and there's a bunny, a little one. I take aim and fire quickly, over his head, and he runs through the fence to the forest. Hearing the bullet whiz through the thimbleberry, and maybe seeing the bunny, Diamond runs out into the forest paths.

I turn; and looking to the blueberries there's another bunny. A brown one, sitting in the middle of the row. He appears to be chewing.

I nestle behind a pile of old fenceposts, resting the barrel and steadying my hands. He's in my cross hairs. I shoot. He's still there. I think I hit him. He's just sitting there upright, motionless where he was. To be sure, I take aim and fire again. It flips, white belly up, and I know it's dead.

Rather than go straight to the kill I go back around where I came, calling for Diamond. She does not come. I put the gun in the house and take a flower from the garden. I walk out to the animal.

There it is. A brown bunny with glassy eyes. It has two gunshot wounds, with a little blood. I get to one knee and thank the Creator. Something like "Thank you Creator for the life of this Bunny. I will use it wisely. I acknowledge and appreciate your abundance." Then I put the blue flower in the the bunny's place, grab it by the ears and carry it. It had some weight to it. I laid it on its side on the concrete back stoop. It laid there dead.

I pace around, wondering where the dog is and what I'll wind up doing with the dead bunny.

It occurred to me to go over to the neighbour's and get stoned.

So I walk over to the fresh clearing, past the potatoes, and into Jeff Garland's land. An old yellow school bus through the grove getting mossy, and a shiny white one ahead. A large unfinished house with lots of big, angular windows. Jeff was doing some weed whacking. I call to him over the sound of the machine.

"Gerald, how are you?"

"You recognized me!"

"Of course."

"Jeez, It must have been ten years at least."

"Yeah, how have you been?"

"I've been good. I've been living at the farm there for almost a week. And you?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

"So my dad mentioned you might have some weed."

"Some weed?" He chuckles. "Yeah, I'll smoke a bowl with you if you're dry."

"He seemed to think you may be selling it."

"Selling it? No, no, but I'll smoke a bowl with ya, come on in." It's just a few yards to his bus. He's older now, with long grey hair and a beard and glasses and an American accent still.

"Is this the same bus you've always had?" It's a nice bus--shower, bedroom, woodstove, kitchenette. He sits at the kitchen table in front of a laptop and fills a little bowl with green dust from a little wooden box just like an old tea head would.

"Yep, it's the same old bus. I've had this bus for oh, 30 years or so, since when we first came out here in the '70s" he says."Then, as you'll recall, I drove it down to Colorado to live for a few years, but yeah; this is the same bus!" he says, raising his hands as if to show 'all this belong to me'
"So how do you like it out here?" he asks.

"I like it. I've been feeling a bit like a hunter-gatherer."

"Ha ha, I'll smoke to that."

The weed starts to get me stoned.

"I just shot a rabbit for the first time."

"Good for you Gerald."

"It's the first time I ever killed a mammal."

"Oh yeah? You don't have to feel bad about it man. They're a scourge! They're a pestilence! There's so damn many of 'em!" He waves his hands emphatically with the pipe in one, takes a hoot and passes it. "One time, I tell ya, I was up at night here, and I went outside, my wife was here then, and I looked out, and it looked like the lawn was movin'! I was like 'what the hell?!' It looked like the lawn was alive!

I didn't know if I was seeing things or what. So I went in and got a flashlight and came out and there was nothin' but bunnies! Hundreds of them! It was like a herd." He waved his arm to emphasize just how massive the herd of bunnies was. "I went in and woke up my wife to show her. It was unheard of. It was amazing."
"Wow."

"So yeah, you don't have to feel bad about killing a rabbit. We gotta kill 'em, by God, don't let them reproduce!"

"Do you eat them?"

"Sure I have. Johnny used to practically live off them."

"How do you cook them?"

"Well you can fry 'em up just like chicken, or stew 'em up. They're pretty easy to skin, just peel it back..."

Would I eat Bunny? Would I have to cut it's skin off and take out its guts? Not when I'm this stoned anyway. Didn't we used to eat rabbits when I was little?

"So, are you going to be living here?"

"Yeah, I'm here; I gave up my room in Vancouver. I'll be going back and forth to do music. I just hope we can keep the farm in the family."

"Well I tell you Gerald, I remember when me and your dad and all the others came here man, and we had a real good thing. Now we're all wondering if your generation is going to keep it going. And boy I tell you, I really hope you do."

"Well I want to, but there's complex factors at work here."

"Like what?"

"Like my grandparents don't trust that I can do it and they might sell the place."

"No, no; It's up to your dad."

"I don't know man; that's what they want to do. The thing is, they just don't respect me."

"Oh, sure they respect you. Maybe it's not verbalized to you, but I know they respect you. They tell me about things you've been doing and I can tell they respect you."

I take a second or two to be taken aback by this thought.

"Well Baba's going to die soon, so there isn't much time to convince her that I can do it."

"Yeah, she is gonna die. It's sad, but it's inevitable. We're all gonna die."

"We sure are. Inches from Death."

He asked me if I was still treeplanting and then told me all about how it was for treeplanters before.

"We got this one contract for thirty cents a tree and the only thing was the gov't were there studying everything. They kept so much data, on all sorts of things. They studied how many steps per tree, trees per minute, all this stuff. I told them fine we'd do it, but there's only one thing--my crew smokes weed, and they're like 'okay'. And you should have seen, when we were spacing, in the morning we'd be scattered all over, they followed us and you could see the progress, from the foggy morning part up to the the first doobie, and from then on..." he waved his arms, "it was perfect. Perfectly spaced, nicely topped off, just artfully done. And they're just like 'what the...?'"

I sauntered through the forest into the scattered failing light of the fields. I couldn't find the dog. I called and called, getting closer to panic with each approaching second. I walked the road were I'd shot the first bunny, and on to the barn and down the back trails where I'd seen her headed last. I tried not to sound desperate in my calls. Not stern. I stood there calling and then looked to the old barn for a moment.

*

There's the old barn and morning light through the trees, before the new barn was built. And there's a cage where the rabbits are kept, beside the barn along the wall. The babies huddle together in a ball, eyes closed, and there's fluff everywhere inside. I'm so little I have to stand on something to look in, or have my dad lift me up to see.

There I am; I'm three, with a great white halo for hair and such innocence in my eyes. I look and look and absorb the world with it's greens and blues, people and pets, and this is all I've seen of the world, this land and sky and trees and eyes.

My dad with his Jesus beard and long hair and overalls rolled up on the bottom where sawdust would sometimes accumulate that he'd have to empty before coming into the house. He moves in deliberate ways.

He opens the little door of the wire cage, puts his hand in and lifts a rabbit out by the ears. It flops around. He takes a hammer and hits it on the back of the neck. A shrill, high-pitched sound, and the rabbits movements become frantic. He hits it again and it stops flopping. Blood flows down it's body and drips to the ground. He hangs it from a nail on the wall of the barn. Then he takes another Bunny from the cage and hits it on the back of the head with a hammer and it bleeds dark maroon fluid that streaks down the barn walls to the ground and pools there reflecting the sky in a different way than water does. Why does he do that to the bunnies?

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What have I done? I've known and loved this dog for over a decade and always left her life for years at a time and she never knows if she'll see me again every time I leave, and when she does she still greets me with ears folded back and insistent face licks like I'm her favourite person ever. And she's had to live with grumpy old people for so long and then I get a gun in my hand and take things so seriously as to be mean to her and now she's run away and I'm alone here and she'll be dead and I have a dead bunny on my hands. I start breathing really heavily.

I rush back down the path, veer toward the house and make my way into the front door and there's Diamond with her ears back and tongue licking the air. I get on one knee and let her lick me, and hug her, and pet her.

"I'm sorry I was being so goofy."

"I'm sorry too."

"I'm glad to see you."

"Me too."

Then I go to the back stoop and invite her along. She comes, looking at her dish for food. Coming up short she looks to me quizzically.

"Look at this." I say, pointing at the rabbit. She comes over, looks, sniffs. She immediately takes it in her mouth, picks it up carefully, gently, clamps down, crunching bones, and trots toward the back of the property with it.

I saw her with it the next day, a third eaten, head first. She ate the rest that night, crunching away on the lawn as I ate my salad.

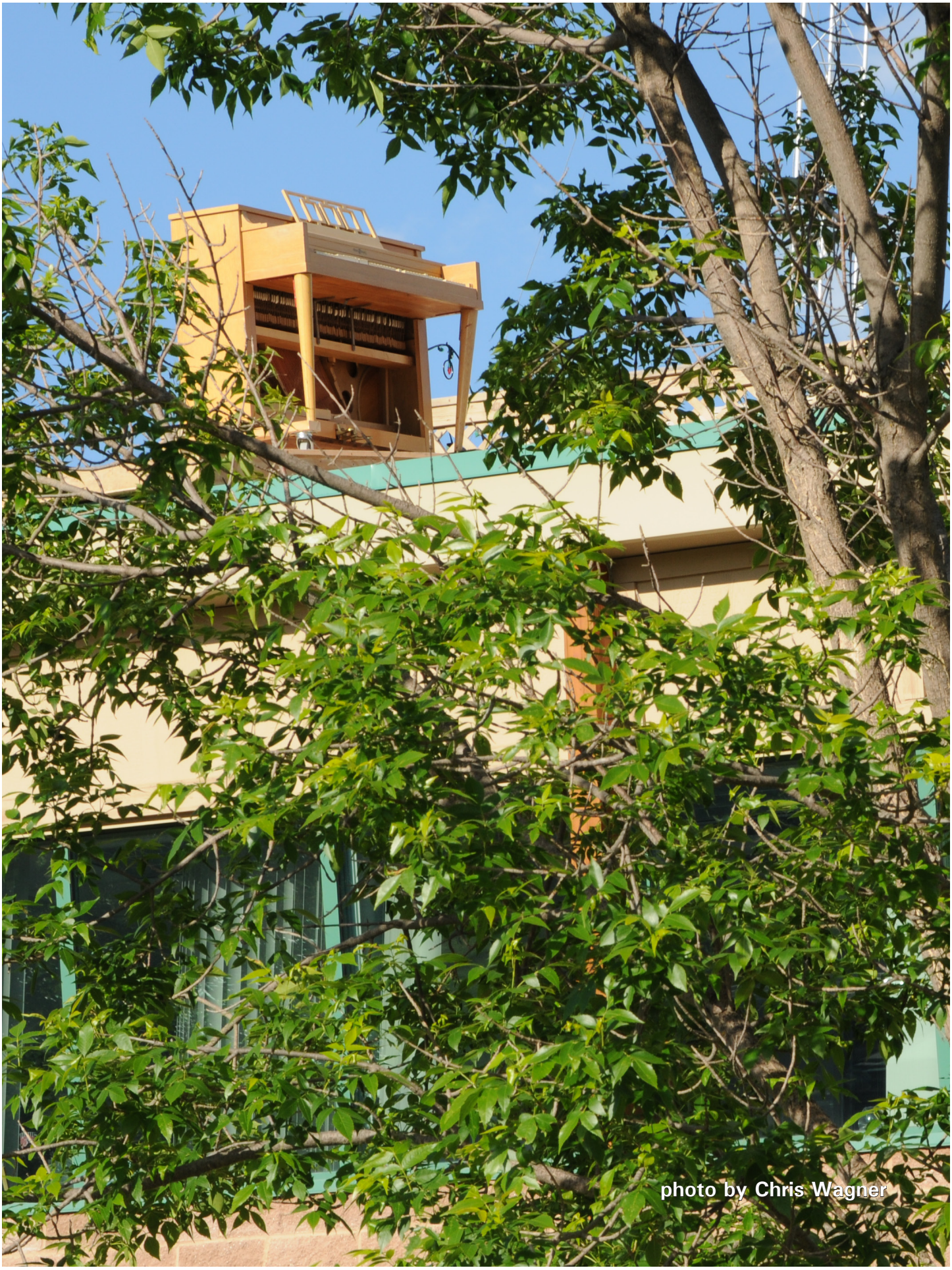
photo by Chris Wagner